

# The ANCIENT TREE

column

Each month we feature an ancient British tree.  
This month the Ancient Tree Forum introduces us to...

## The Craigends Yew, Renfrewshire

This tree is one of the largest and possibly oldest examples of a layering yew (*Taxus baccata*) in Scotland. These are yews which have chosen to lay down their branches as they grow, which then root and send up new stems. Eventually, as the central stem dies back, these can become remnants of the original tree, with identical DNA.

Little is known about the history of the tree, which grows by the River Gryffe at Houston. The Craigends House was originally built nearby, in 1479; could it be an original planting? It could be around 600 years old, but it is difficult to age the tree by its girth as this has been exaggerated by the out-falling stems. In 1890, the girth was measured at 6.4m and it is now recorded as 8.68m.

The Craigends Yew is a very imposing, multi-stemmed tree which one could describe as octopus-like, the stems stretching outwards and downwards where some have layered around the main trunk. The largest of the new stems is 1.3m in girth. The crown spread is about 40m from west to east, with some pruning having reduced the measurement. It's unclear as to why the tree is so multi-stemmed. Other famous layering yews have a distinct trunk, whereas this one is growing more like a tree that was cut or coppiced in the distant past.

The tree hosts quite a few epiphytes such as ferns, grasses, mosses and lichens. There is loss of bark to the main stems; we don't know if this is caused by vandalism and tree climbing or through age or other factors. There are also signs of fires having been lit under the tree.

The Craigends Yew was entered for the Tree of the Year competition after a local woman contacted the Woodland Trust, wanting help in her quest to get more recognition for the tree by locals. A footpath runs alongside it and through a housing estate, but the tree is almost obscured from view by a large Atlas cedar, and a sign once put up is now illegible. The tree came second in the competition for the Scottish Tree of the Year and as a result of the publicity there has been a lot more local interest. A new information sign is being made, and it is hoped that the tree's future has been secured.

Photographs and words by Judy Dowling, lead voluntary verifier for the Ancient Tree Inventory, Woodland Trust and recorder for TROBI (Tree Register of the British Isles).

**The Ancient Tree Forum champions the biological, cultural and heritage value of Britain's ancient and veteran trees, and provides advice on their value and management at [www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk](http://www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk)**



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